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## Literacy, Diversity and Education: Meeting the Contemporary Challenge

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# **Literacy, Diversity and Education: Meeting the Contemporary Challenge**

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## **Abstract**

The changing nature of our classrooms in terms of students' racial population demands an understanding and validation into the different ways in which various ethnocultural and Aboriginal students respond to schools, classroom environments, curricula, and teaching strategies to ensure academic success. This paper is part of a larger study that examines literacy and diversity in relation to the educational challenges in Ontario schools. The focus of this paper is on a qualitative case study involving twenty educators. The study's findings reveal educators' articulations with regards to the connections between equity, diversity and multiple literacies.

## **Résumé:**

La nature changeante de nos salles de classe en termes de la population raciale des étudiants exige une compréhension et une validation des différentes manières auxquelles les divers étudiants ethnoculturels et indigènes répondent aux écoles, aux environnements de salle de classe, aux programmes d'études, et aux stratégies d'enseignement pour assurer le succès scolaire. Ce travail fait partie d'une étude plus large qui examine la littératie et la diversité dans les écoles ontariennes par rapport aux défis éducationnels. Le travail met l'accent sur une étude de cas qualitative impliquant vingt éducateurs. L'étude révèle les articulations des éducateurs en ce qui concerne les liens entre l'équité, la diversité et les littératies multiples.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper is part of a larger study that examines literacy and diversity in relation to the educational challenges in today's Ontario classrooms. In our work as educational researchers, we often encounter teachers and school administrators who have the best of intentions at heart regarding the education of youth. Educators are acutely aware of the tremendous responsibility placed on their shoulders to educate youth for a fast changing and complex world. Among the many challenges for Canadian educators, we can point to a select few as far as questions of literacy and education are concerned: how do we ensure success for all students? How do we make Canadian schools inclusive not only in terms of knowledges, curriculum,

texts, culture of schooling, but also in terms of the physical representation and make up of our institutions? How do we develop appropriate instructional strategies to enable learners to be aware of themselves, their communities, and responsibilities? How do we respond to youth disengagement from school? How do we provide learners with the requisite knowledge and skills required to function in contemporary society? The latter question is informed by current discussions on the role and importance of literacy and numeracy in youth education. We use the “we” to implicate educators, administrators, policy workers, researchers, field practitioners, students, parents and communities. Contemporary society demands for “literate workers and citizens” are huge. This obsession is not simply about an ability to communicate, read and write. It also about learners becoming politically, economically and socially literate so as to grasp some of the complexities of social existence. How can we understand something we do not know? How we can we understand knowledge without understanding the language of that knowledge. For us, the language of that knowledge is literacy. When analyzed critically this is what multiple literacies seek to get across, the importance of understanding knowledge through language competency. We cannot draw on something we cannot read, understand and appreciate. Multiple literacies are so critical to today’s education as they place diverse learners into similar and shared spaces.

Given the fact that race, gender, class, sexuality, [dis]ability all play significant roles in shaping an individual’s social prospects (e.g., economic mobility and employment), literacy cannot be simplistically viewed as an independent variable in education. In fact, there is good and abundant research pointing to the fact that there exists a powerful correlation between race and poverty (Corley, 2003). We also know that differences in students’ academic performance “as literate subjects” are correlated with social difference (race, gender, class, sexuality, [dis] ability, etc). To address the perceived differences in students’ performance, critical research points to the importance of education speaking to the lived realities of students as well as becoming “culturally responsive and relevant” to the needs of local communities. It is through such educational approaches that education as a whole can help learners move toward critical reflection and social action, create greater self sufficiency and social awareness (see also Corley, 2003).

## **HISTORY AND CONTEXT**

Canada’s ethnocultural profile has become increasingly multiethnic and multicultural. The last national census revealed that over two hundred different ethnic groups now inhabit Canada’s 13 provinces and territories. Since 1901, Canada has welcomed 13.4 million immigrants. Before 1961, 90.4 % of all immigrants came from European countries. Since then, the sociocultural demographics of immigrants have changed significantly. In fact, between 1991 and 2001, of the 2.2 million immigrants who were admitted to Canada (the highest number for any decade in the past century), 58% came from Asia, including the Middle East, 20% from Europe, 11% from the Caribbean, Central and South America, 8% from Africa,

and 3% from the United States.

For years, Ontario has welcomed the bulk of these newly landed immigrants, and currently about half the province's population is made up of people from minority ethnocultural groups. Toronto, relative to other large cities around the world, now has one of the highest proportions of immigrants. Consequently, Ontario now hosts a multicultural society within its provincial borders and educational institutions. Ontario's educational institutions are now faced with the challenging task of educating an increasingly diversified student body, of which the majority no longer originates from Europe. Consequently, our attempts as educators to interpret, and then teach the provincial curriculum to ethnocultural students remains an ongoing endeavour.<sup>1</sup>

The effectiveness of literacy education would demand educators play a more focal role in the classroom. How students are expected to perform in school and then communicate what they have learned may differ across cultures. Teachers need to recognize that the cultural responses students learn at home, in terms of cognition, emotion, and behaviour, play a crucial—and often conflicting - role in the way they negotiate the expectations of school literacies. It seems important therefore that teachers reflect on why understanding the cultural nature and meaning of the “what” and “how” they teach, with respect to worldviews, can affect the learning outcomes of students. Therefore, meeting the province's literacy objectives will require Ontario teachers to listen to and engage with alternative literacies ethnocultural students potentially bring to classrooms. This study seeks to further understand the teaching and evaluating strategies that teachers use in the classroom.

A review of the literature provides a background and contexts for our study. In order to reach the objectives of excellence for all in education in Ontario, the Ministry of Education published several documents: *Literacy for Learning* (2004), *Education for All* (2005), *Early Reading Strategy* (2003), *Teaching and Learning Mathematics* (2004). These reports offer teaching and learning strategies that will enable teachers to better meet students' needs in terms of numeracy and literacy in Ontario's Anglophone and Francophone schools. They fully focus on the specific issues that surround students of an ethnocultural minority. However, these issues are significant and require an in-depth examination in light of the factors linked to literacy, such as: personal factors, family-related and academic factors. Several studies have centered on a few of these issues (Lareau, & Hovat, 1999; Jeynes, 2003). In order to corroborate John Ogbu's theory [voluntary and involuntary minorities and academic success], Samuel, Krugly-Smolksa & Warren, (2001) studied the academic results of adolescents belonging to voluntary, as opposed to involuntary, minority/ethnocultural groups. The findings in the article indicate that the majority of the students who belong to voluntary, as opposed to involuntary, minority and ethnocultural groups excel in academic performance despite language barriers and racial discrimination.

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<sup>1</sup> The demographic information from this and the previous paragraph is from the following Sources: Ghosh and Abdi (2004); and Statistics Canada, (2003, 2002).

The teaching personnel must establish realistic, concrete, and accessible goals regarding literacy and numeracy. Teachers must consider the five following factors that impact on students' chances of reaching an objective: the necessary time to reach the objective, the thought and reflection that must accompany it, the effort required and the appropriate resources (Acker, Inzirillo & Lefebvre, 2000). Personnel must also provide students with information regarding content and learning levels (Archambault & Chouinard, 1996). Teachers must use interesting and efficient teaching aides as well as ensure that the subject matter is understood. Teachers must employ an optimistic management style so as to positively influence students' behaviour (Nadeau, 1997). Teachers must establish good communication lines with students; in other words, they must know how to listen, counsel, and converse about students' personal experiences. Teachers must also create an atmosphere that will motivate students and incite them to participate in classroom life (Acker, Inzirillo & Lefebvre, 2000; Nadeau 1997; Reeve, 1996).

## **RESEARCH STUDY AND METHODOLOGY**

As noted, the larger study, for which this part presents some case study findings, looks at the teaching and assessment practices of teachers in the context of diversity in settings that differ throughout French, English, public and catholic schools all over Ontario. The broader study relied on the combination of in-depth interviews, questionnaires and case study approaches for data gathering. By combining these approaches with data collection, this study uses a mixed model method (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) that will yield both broad-based patterns and in-depth details regarding practices in the context of diversity in Ontario. The respondents' training in literacy and numeracy occurred mostly during initial teacher education courses or in short training sessions by their boards. However, more than a quarter of the teachers were trained for more than 5 days by their boards and a similar percentage went through a summer institute. A small number of teachers have taken it upon themselves to do professional development by completing the reading specialist, the library course or ADQ in mathematics. In an effort to gain in-depth answers to some pertinent research questions, a protocol [research guide] was used for interviewing selected participants in the case study.

In the case study, data gathering was done through in-depth interviews conducted with twenty elementary teachers across Ontario in the winter of 2007. These teachers were contacted after completing a survey on classroom practices and philosophy. Surveys were sent to boards across Ontario, after which researchers selected twenty candidates for further study. Of the teachers selected, nine were Francophone and eleven were Anglophone. In an effort to gain in-depth answers to some pertinent research questions, a protocol [research guide] was used in each interview (see appendix 1). The qualitative data gathering approach was framed to maximize the voice to local subjects. The interviews were carried out by graduate researchers. Open-ended questions were asked in a semi-structured interview style. Participants were asked to speak from experience, were given time to reflect on

their responses and asked to present other issues of interest or concern. Participants were asked about their understandings of literacy, multiple literacies and the context for discussing issues of equity, difference and diversity, and the notion of inclusion in literacy education. The focus of the data analysis was also to identify specific educational initiatives (instruction, pedagogy curriculum and policy) targeting and implicating literacy education. The data were qualitatively analyzed for general trends in innovative pedagogic and instructional inclusive practices on literacy. Through triangulation, we have been able to compare individual narratives between and among teachers, administrators and officials working at the primary, college and university levels and locate general patterns. As noted elsewhere (Dei, 2004), the importance of “voice” allows readers to bring their own interpretations to the data. Participant voice moves the analysis beyond an abstract, theoretical discussion of literacy to reveal a nuanced interpretation of the meaning of literacy and inclusive education. For the critical researcher, voice provides insight into the historical and present contexts that contribute to participants’ standpoint knowledge.

The information collected from the interviews reveals complex and variegated understandings of literacy, diversity and the relationship between the two. Reflecting and reporting on these findings, this paper specifically raises issues regarding equity, diversity and literacy. These were the trends that emerged from across the interviews, French and English, urban and rural. Apart from a macro analysis of these trends, we have also looked at successful practices outlined by the teachers interviewed for the study. The discussion highlights what has worked and what has not, as far as approaches and activities to literacy and diversity.

## **FINDINGS OF THE QUALITATIVE STUDY**

Given the competitive nature of the global economy, youth, more so today, have to be well equipped with diverse knowledges to take on the challenges of the labour market (see Berger, Forgette-Giroux and Dei, 2007). In terms of success and social mobility, education plays an important role. Students’ understanding of success is often linked to a form of academic achievement that guarantees fulfillment in the labor market. In educating youth, literacy is vital. Education is very much a status symbol that comes with social rewards. Lack of a basic education puts students at a disadvantage in terms of accessing the valued goods and services of society, hence governments encourage literacy and numeracy in schools. Preparing youths today for the many challenges of the globalized economy is quite a task. We need to understand how literacy is shaped, formed and re/presents itself today. We ask then, what does it mean to be literate in a consumerist economy? What constitutes educational success and what are the important indicators of this assigned success? What are the conditions for making possible high literacy and numeracy rates in schools? And what are the responsibilities for the learners, schools, parents, communities and educators? In this paper, our purpose is not necessarily to answer these questions. Instead, we are more focused on how we come to understand and find answers to some of these questions.

## **Reflections on Equity, Multiple Literacies and Inclusion**

### *a) Equity*

Literacy in the broader philosophical context of equity is critical for addressing educational success for diverse learners. Literacy is not simply reading and writing, but also the ability to grasp and work with knowledge to bring about personal and social transformation. The relations between schooling and success cannot be assumed, but must be theorized. Such theorization requires an understanding of the nexus of equity, inclusion and literacy. Schooling and success are not necessarily related, in part because schools are not the only sites, or avenues, for learning. The current “inclusive schooling discourse” can be limiting when it shifts its gaze away from anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-classist, anti-homophobic and anti-oppression approaches. Although answers to all parts of the interview protocol varied, certain approaches and understandings emerged consistently to illuminate the notions of literacy, equity and inclusion. Further, of the teacher participants who were actively engaged in literacy and diversity as far as pedagogy of equity, the same critiques of common understandings of equity emerged. These reflections and observations, as far as literacy and diversity, or literacy and inclusion, specifically of ethnocultural minorities, are instructive.

According to teachers interviewed for the project, the Ministry, some boards and many administrators generally misconceive equity. This is not necessarily a reflection of the values of the individuals who make up these groups, but rather the product of the misplacement of equity and equity initiatives at all of these levels. Equity is something for which we collectively work to make happen. Equity is not a subject or a program. It is a holistic approach to teaching and learning, which must play a role in all stages of the schooling process; from curriculum design, to teacher training, to teacher hiring, to classroom planning, to resource design, to course delivery, to school administration and to school/community relations.

In racially homogeneous schools, teachers reported on the deafening silence surrounding equity issues. As Dei (2006) has argued elsewhere, pedagogy of equity must proceed in dominant contexts where people are racialized for privilege, as well as in contexts where people are racialized for punishment. In many schools, there are no celebrations of non-Christian and/or non-European events and holidays, despite overwhelmingly non-European student populations. Recognition of different cultures is thus forcibly confined to the classroom where time and resources are commonly quite scarce. Teachers whose schools did acknowledge multicultural holidays pointed out that even these efforts are insufficient. With certain special days assigned to “other” cultures, the rest of the year is implicitly devoted to the “normal” culture.

Teachers in particular, must centre equity across the board. Equity does not work if it only happens in one classroom. Support from administration for school-wide initiatives and events is also crucial, as it is difficult to teach against the will of one’s administration. A holistic incorporation of an equity lens in order to support work with diversity and multiple literacies requires casting our gaze beyond the walls and halls of our schools, to the community at large. Schools are meant



to serve communities; they exist for our communities and yet too often function without them. Teachers must get to know families in order to understand students. Teachers must understand the cultural underpinnings of student families in order to understand the families themselves. One of the teachers interviewed takes the time each year to visit the homes of all of her students ahead of the start of class. She recalled:

It takes me about 3 or 4 days to do it. And if they're home, as I said, it's great; and if they're not I've had parents they find me in the phone book and they say, "I'm going to be home at such-and-such... if you're back in the neighbourhood during that time period, could you stop in?" And I usually do (100E8).

Equity is by no means absent from the curriculum, however it is not fundamental to it, and this is the issue. Until equity is centred in the curriculum, as well as in other institutional and structural elements of the educational system, our classrooms will continue to be inequitable places and our teachers will have their hands tied as far as literacy programs which truly engage students of diverse backgrounds. Another teacher elaborated this point as follows:

I think one of the things that is a challenge is again the time constraints and the curriculum expectations not really addressing literacy and diversity. They do to a certain extent, but because they're so general, it's not that they... they could be interpreted in many different ways. So they may say that... You may say that students are able to read a variety of texts, and they may give some examples of say traditional stories from Aboriginal North Americans, or they may say traditional stories from African Folklore. They may give examples but it's not that they are requiring those things. So I think that that's a challenge. (100E4).

For every student to be part of the program, the program must reflect every student. Ministry expectations are often quite vague, and thus allow for substantial amounts of imported discourse and bias. The individual perspective and social location of the teacher are potentially quite salient with regards to what and how students learn in a given teacher's class. This is both an opportunity and danger. Although the curriculum may require a teacher to introduce her students to diverse texts, the curriculum does not specifically say "be sure texts portray women in positions of power" or "be sure to include text by writers of colour which tell culturally accurate stories." One teacher pointed out that while she now had numerous books with Black characters, the stories and cultural referents had not changed. In one case, a story's characters had actually been coloured in black in a new edition, with no adjustments to facial features, the story line or the cultural referents therein. So although bodies matter as far as representation, bodies alone (especially on the page) are not enough as far as successful literacy and diversity practices.

We must look to the existing curricula and policy for the omissions, denials



and silences which have led us to sum up cultural practices and wisdoms developed over millennia, in one day. We must critically investigate the cultural paradigm which has allowed an entire people's history to be boxed into one month a year (and only in some schools). Many teachers begin planning with the ministry expectations in mind as a starting point from which to work backwards into the classroom. In recognition of the work that needs to be done in the field of literacy and diversity, others are choosing to begin planning with the students in mind (to whatever degree time allows) and working forward from there to the expectations. This approach centres equity in the planning stage and will work towards centring equity at the delivery stage as well.

*b) Multiple Literacies*

While teachers understand multiple literacies and literacy in a variety of ways, successful engagement with literacy and diversity includes an understanding of both social and independent constructivism, as far as the experience of student knowledge production. Literacy begins long before it is taught at school, with the beginning of dialogic communication and observation. Literacy is at once social and independent, and works with the making of meaning. It is the coming together of a text with a student's personal experiences, as well as with a social context. As one teacher explained it:

My understanding of multiple literacies is I'll have a student who will understand what they read with a background knowledge and prior knowledge of conventions and what's been previously learned; but they just need to read it in order to understand what they're reading (100E11).

Text is more than simply the written word. It includes images, interactions, video and various digital media. One teacher explained literacy and "texts" as follows:

... reading of text in a way that helps one to understand it and make meaning of it; it can be like reading actual words it can be reading and interpreting visual information, basically any kind of text, whether it be written or visual, that has meaning to be made, and if the reader is able to make meaning of it (100E3).

Literacy can be understood as an operating system for the navigation of our lives as both individuals and as part of a larger society. Multiple literacies was also understood in different ways by different teachers, some invoking the work of Howard Gardner (2000) and multiple intelligences and others working with ideas about what learners bring to their own literacy learning. This latter understanding is most instructive for this study. In this sense, students understand the texts they encounter with prior knowledge of conventions developed through previous learning. One teacher explained her approach:

... my understanding of literacy is the coming together of the reading of the text but it has to do with the individual's personal experience, I think that I definitely, in my teaching, take that into consideration; and when I'm planning teaching of texts to students, I take that into consideration

as maybe the first thing - what are the different ways to read this text, and how are my students going to access it; not that I know always in advance, but what are some of the possible ways, and I really take that into consideration. So I think that multiple literacies is pretty important to me (100E4).

This has implications for text and resource selection on the part of the Ministry, boards, schools, departments and teachers. That which students bring to their learning must be recognized in the content thereof.

### *c) Inclusion*

Literacy, equity and inclusion are fundamentally related. If we understand literacy at its core, as processes of making meaning, we can extend this idea to the notion of processes of being included in knowledge – in both an individual and social constructivist sense. One teacher explained as follows:

They're bringing so many different background knowledge and experiences, and in order for them to be successful you have to tap into that experience to be meaningful, and it's all about meaning for them; and they're going to get so much more and have such a higher level of thinking if you're able to tap into that (100E7).

Inclusion is an issue in all educational contexts and is fundamental to every part of the schooling process. Students bring multiple and varied background knowledges and experiences to their learning. One teacher described inclusion as follows:

...making an environment in the classroom which feels comfortable for all students, which includes the interests and as much as possible the backgrounds of all students, and give them multiple opportunities to share those and to tap into those and to draw upon those to build on their learning, and have those be their strengths and pillars for their learning... (100E3).

As far as literacy and diversity, inclusion demands that teachers access student and community experiences in order to both confer validity on those experiences and also to create the necessary meaning for literacy learning to take place.

So, while education has often sought to proceed without official regard for race, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability/disability or class, true inclusion means actually regarding these facts of existence for students and teachers. While the teacher in the following excerpt speaks of proceeding without regard to different sites of oppression, it is through addressing diversity that she has had classroom success:

Inclusiveness is making sure that every one is, regardless of race and gender and any identity, religious background, that they're all equally validated as a human being; and hopefully represented, and taken into

consideration their backgrounds. So what their views and beliefs are [needs to be considered] (100E11).

Silence around race, as many critical anti-racist educators have argued, intensifies racial oppression. A cursory glance at the degree to which disability has been taken up in schools across the province over the last twenty years reveals that 1) substantive and instrumental changes are possible in a relatively short amount of time in the Ontario school system, and 2) the silence which characterized our understandings of disability leading up to the new approaches of the last two decades, constituted a failed approach. Although race, gender, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation are not disabilities, they are often mobilized as disadvantages in the current system. Inclusion then, means not finding a class where race, gender or other social locations do not matter, but creating a learning environment that works from, centres, reflects and engages diverse epistemologies, histories and texts.

## DISCUSSION

Literacy is also very much about power relationships and institutionalization of power (Quigley 1997; Nieto, 1992). An analysis of literacy as power and knowledge also benefits from a more radical conception of literacy as social class attribute. A view of literacy as socio-economic status is farther than a traditional Weberian view of “class” as socio-economic stratification.

In Berger, Forgette-Giroux and Dei (2007) we argue that rethinking schooling processes for youth and adult learners is rupturing the dominant conception of literacy with the focus on the intersection of ethnicity/race, gender, class, sexuality and [dis]ability. Critical literacy enables learners to understand not only how education affects social issues, but also, how racism, social oppression and socioeconomic status determine life chances for different bodies in society (see also D’Amico 1999; Corley, 2003). Literacy must connect educational strategies to address power and social inequity. The everyday experiences of students should be grounded in schooling and education, they should connect with students’ experiences and with the broader socio-structural and political forces of society, in this way critical literacy can help learners make sense of knowledge and the learning process. If then, the purpose of education is to help learners reflect on their individual experiences and to engage in social action for change, critical literacy should be utilized in order to enhance students academic and social achievement. We must also remember, that understanding membership in community, citizenry responsibility and obligations to oneself and others are all elements of “good and inclusive education” (see again Berger, Forgette-Giroux and Dei, 2007). With the experiences of learners marginalized in society, that is, Indigenous histories, cultures, languages, students identities and subjectivities being devalued and underprivileged in the school system, what it suggests then, is that we can expect differences in literate competency levels, for the simple reason that, in such an

educational context, students are always already disengaged with the knowledges being disseminated. We must note how students identify with the learning process, for it goes a long way in ensuring the creation of a critically literate citizenship.

When engaged in teaching and learning about self, identity and the connections with communities of learners, critical literacy has much to offer. By teaching about the limits of learners developing a sense of entitlement without responsibility to a community and citizenship critical literacy provides possibilities for educational and social transformation. By empowering the learner to understand their place and roles in society and the matching responsibilities of community belonging, critical literacy helps create a global learner. Critical literacy then becomes another space and possibility to create alternative visions of society and imagining possibilities for the future. While schools are contested spaces, the production of educational success requires the joint contributions and responsibilities of educators, students, parents, communities and the state.

Literacy in the context of social difference is relational and dynamic in terms of building on the knowledge/power relationship approach to understanding the power of literacy and the links to forms of power, control and decision making about educational achievement, success and failure. The efforts at literacy directed towards primary and elementary-school aged children are commendable. The goal of literacy education should be teaching interpersonal development; self-discipline, social responsibility, cooperation, non-violent conflict resolution, caring for others, goal-setting, participation in class, responsible citizenship, and the school code of conduct. Curriculum materials could be more reflective of the diversity of elementary and secondary students, and allow for a comfort and familiarity with narratives of Indigenous African philosophies when it comes to values and character education. For example, through the medium of story-telling, educators can use African/Aboriginal and other Indigenous philosophies to teach about character development and moral values as a basis for literacy development for Canadian students. The goals of such curriculum materials is to have in place a body of text material to allow sustained engagement/story development, in a variety of formats and settings that instill knowledge (stories, visual images, songs) about culture and history containing positive political, moral ideas.

In working to promote educational success through multiple literacies, the concern should not be just about generating knowledge to a group of learners and educators or seeing these individuals and groups as objects of knowledge. We also need to learn about the possibilities of achieving competencies in multiple literacies through alternative visions of schooling. This has implications for transforming the current school system. We see educational success then as evolving rather than “moving from one predetermined step to another” (Fine and Vanderslice, 2005: 208).

By affirming and reinforcing identities we connect issues of equity, literacy and school success. Through literacy competence, learners are able to engage in the contestations over knowledge, culture, values and understandings of the role and purpose of education. Learners are able to appreciate the dynamics of everyday

relations and the interplay of school culture, social climate and environment that shape the construction of learners' identities. This is what shapes the macro-social politics of education in order to help create success for diverse learners. As noted elsewhere (Dei, 2004), educational success can be attributed to four inter-related factors, including learner's ability to withstand the politically and culturally mediated experiences of conventional schooling through the development of a critical and strong sense of self, self worth and purpose, as well as a sense of connectedness and belonging to a community of learners. It also implies the ability of the learner to call and rely on wider social responsibilities and mechanisms, including material and non-material support networks both inside and outside school, and in the wider community in the quest for educational excellence. In such instances, parents and communities being supportive and acting as sounding boards and sources of motivation for the learner are crucial. Others include the ability of the learner to identify with the institutional structures for teaching, learning and administration of education as far as it impacts the academic success of the student. That is, the student is able to relate to the culture, climate, environment and the socio-organizational lives of the school, including its curricular, textual, pedagogic and communicative practices, as well as the official and hidden rules and regulations that constitute acceptable norms of the school system. The failure to identify the informal regulations of schooling fosters a strong belief that the structures work effectively to promote excellence for the learner irrespective of class, race, gender, sexual, linguistic and religious differences. Finally, the learner's ability to evoke individual agency, in calling for accountability and transparency in educational practices also has a lot to do with the learner's sense of entitlement to education and a confidence in the community to call upon the state to meet its responsibilities to the learner as a citizen. In this instance, education is seen largely as a right and the learner is able to develop a sense of entitlement to this education.

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## APPENDIX 1

### A. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your understanding of literacy?  
Probe – Do you work with the idea of multiple literacies?
2. How does this understanding connect to your philosophy of teaching and learning?
3. Describe the strategies that you use to promote literacy in the classroom.  
Probe – texts, approaches, resources etc.
4. What do you think is most effective about these strategies and why?  
Probe – Are other people using these same strategies? Did you develop them?
- 4a) How do your strategies lead to student success?
5. How do you tailor your strategies to the individual needs of your students?
6. With regards to literacy, what are some of the ways the Ontario curriculum expectations help or hinder your work with difference in the classroom (e.g. race, class, gender, language, religion, sexual orientation, ability and ethnicity)?
7. What do you think is the relationship between identity (e.g. race, class, gender, language, religion, sexual orientation, ability and ethnicity) and the ways that students learn?  
Probe- Are these connected?
8. What is your understanding of inclusiveness?
9. What is your understanding of diversity?
- 9a) How do issues relating to inclusiveness and diversity play out in your school and classroom?
10. Can you share some examples about your inclusive classroom practices?  
Provide examples and scenarios of some approaches that have worked and some that have not. What factors account for the success or lack thereof, of these approaches?
11. What support do you receive for your work with literacy and diversity (e.g. from the board, school, colleagues, local communities)?
- 11a) What challenges do you face in doing this work? What sorts of support do you require to improve upon your work with literacy and diversity?  
Probe - professional development; administration; resources
12. Who are the students that are successful in your classroom: can you tell me about them?
- 12a) How do you assess student success?  
Probe – How does your assessment inform your teaching?

## B. SCENARIOS

[Scenarios distributed to teachers before the interview.]

### Scenario 1:

A colleague tells you that she/he has decided to give up on a student who shows no interest in any of the strategies that they have used to help him/her learn. The student is disruptive and belligerent. How would you help this student? What advice would you give? And what will indicate to you that you are succeeding in your endeavours?

### Scenario 2:

A student in your class is struggling with literacy. She/he often seems distracted and lethargic. You are convinced learning is not happening but are not sure. What would you do differently to help her/him learn? How would you explain the situation and your response/action to another colleague?

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